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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN'S DUVANOV: "YOU'RE LOSING THE INFORMATION WAR  
WITH RUSSIA"

REF: A) ASTANA 2249  
B) ASTANA 2469

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Independent journalist Sergei Duvanov judges:

-- the United States is losing the information war with Russia in  
Kazakhstan because we are doing little effective to provide an  
alternative to Russia's massive domination of the information space  
in Central Asia;

-- RFE/RL has little, if any, influence;

-- the ideal would be a non-U.S.-government source like a CNN or BBC  
Russian-language service, or a major Soros-funded effort; and

-- many U.S. "democracy grants" go to recipients with little  
influence.

Duvanov has his own self-interest, but his analysis of the United  
States missing in action in providing Russian-language information  
in Central Asia is wholly accurate. While we might quibble with  
some of his detailed recommendations, for our own national interests  
we would do well to pay attention to his general views. END  
SUMMARY.

RUSSIA DOMINATES THE MASS MEDIA

3. (SBU) The Ambassador met December 19 in Almaty with Sergei  
Duvanov, a leading independent opposition journalist, to discuss the  
state of mass media in Kazakhstan. Duvanov judged the Internet was  
not yet widespread enough to be a serious source of information in  
Kazakhstan, but its influence has grown significantly in the past  
two years, a trend he expects to continue. With the Internet's  
reach still low, Russian television remains the dominant source of  
information for Kazakhstanis. Kazakh state television has very  
little influence in the information sphere, and in Duvanov's  
estimation, Russian-language media dominate 90% of Kazakhstan's  
television market and control the most popular Internet news sites.  
Of the local sites, Duvanov named [www.kub.info](#), [Eurasia.org.ru](#), and  
[zonakz.net](#) as the most popular, but asserted that none was free of  
its own political spin.

## LOSING THE INFORMATION WAR

14. (SBU) Duvanov does not stake much on Radio Liberty's influence in Kazakhstan -- it simply cannot compete with the Russian media in popularity. "There is no counterweight to the false information coming from Russia," said Duvanov, giving the example of how the majority of Kazakhstanis believe the claims of some Russian channels that the United States took over Iraq for oil. "The information war between the United States and Russia has begun again, and the United States is losing," he stressed. (NOTE: Similar arguments that lack of alternative media sources doomed Kazakhstan to the "information periphery" were made at the recent media conference hosted by Kazakhstan's Press Club. See ref. B.)

15. (SBU) Duvanov outlined several ways in which the United States could attempt to level the media playing field. One would be to create something similar to the Voice of America for Central Asia. (COMMENT: The head of opposition party Azat, Bulat Abilov, made the same suggestions during his November meeting with the Ambassador (reftel A). Many who remember the Soviet period fondly recall VOA in Russian for its high-quality entertainment and objective international news. END COMMENT.) Another would be to invest in a satellite television channel that would provide an alternative to the existing Russian channels. (NOTE: Duvanov said "no one watches" the U.S.-funded InterNews satellite TV effort because it is boring. END NOTE.) A third would be to create Internet sites that would provide objective political coverage and also include entertainment. Duvanov noted that an official U.S. government site might be limited in its ability to provide fully objective information and suggested it would be better to distance the site from the government to allow "more room to maneuver." For any major Russian-language media effort, Duvanov suggested Soros or similar funding. He agreed CNN-Russian would be effective and important in

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providing alternate sources of information on the West. The EuroNews Russian-language channel is currently the best source of independent news in Kazakhstan, said Duvanov, and is widely watched by the intelligentsia who can afford to subscribe to it. He added BBC in Russian could be the ideal counterbalance to Russian media.

"YOUR DEMOCRACY GRANTS DON'T WORK"

16. (SBU) Duvanov judged that many U.S. "democracy grants are not working," commenting that a number of recipients rely 90% on the U.S. grants to live but have little to show for it. He suggested the U.S. government could more effectively use its grant money to support the development of the information sector in Kazakhstan. He suggested the following activities: build an independent mass media, develop a Central Asia satellite channel or Internet site in the Russian language, support regional independent newspapers (Duvanov commented regional papers outside Almaty and Astana have a difficulty finding support, apart from special-interest sources), fund "democracy schools" where students and young people can listen to lectures by prominent public figures and politicians, and support political discussion clubs.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Duvanov is somewhat of a controversial figure in Kazakhstan, in large part because of a sordid court case against him about six years ago in which he was set up and entrapped; but he is fully in the mainstream of civil society activists who understand the fundamentals of democracy. His analysis of the United States missing in action in providing Russian-language information in Central Asia is wholly accurate. While we might quibble with some of his detailed recommendations - especially those that retrograde forces in Kazakhstan could easily counter - for our own national interests we would do well to pay attention to his general views. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND